United Nations E/CN.9/2018/NGO/15

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
8 January 2018

Original: English

Commission on Population and Development
Fifty-first session
9–13 April 2018
Item 3 of the provisional agenda[1]

General Debate 3 (a): Actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development at the global, regional and national levels

3 (b): Sustainable cities, human mobility and international migration

Statement submitted by World Youth Alliance, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council[2]

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[1] E/CN.9/2018/1.
[2] The present statement is issued without formal editing.

18-00176 (E) 180118

Please recycle

Statement

The World Youth Alliance is a global coalition of young people dedicated to the promotion and defence of human dignity in policy and culture and building solidarity between young people in developing and developed countries. With over 200,000 young people as members in more than 130 countries, the organization welcomes the opportunity to address the Commission on the theme of sustainable cities, human mobility and international migration.

It is essential to keep people at the centre of development, including as many move to cities. Urbanization creates both challenges and opportunities for development. Sustainable cities require authentic development — development that empowers people to be participants in their communities and bring about sustainability. The elements of SDG 16, "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels", are key to achieving this. Societies which are just and whose institutions are accountable are ones that ensure every person has access on an equal basis to the fundamental forms of capital.

One way to understand Goal 16 is providing universal access to various forms of capital. According to Michael Fairbanks, former advisor to President Paul Kagame of Rwanda, there are seven forms of capital to which people need access. These are: natural endowments such as location, subsoil assets, forests, beaches, and climate; the financial resources of a nation, such as savings and international reserves; humanly made capital, such as buildings, bridges, roads, and telecommunications assets; institutional capital, such as legal protections of tangible and intangible property, efficient government departments, and firms that maximize value to shareholders and compensate and train workers; knowledge resources, such as international patents, and university and think tank capacities; human capital, which represents skills, insights and capabilities; and culture capital, which means not only the explicit articulations of culture like music, language, and ritualistic tradition, but also attitudes and values that are linked to innovation.

Sustainable cities require good stewardship of all these forms of capital. Cities are loci for government services that provide job opportunities and cultural services. They also have the authority to administer civil registrations. Locally-led initiatives, comprehensible regulations, and appropriate infrastructure create conditions in which people drive development. Authentic development always focuses on equipping and empowering people.

In cities where corruption is widespread, the poor often cannot afford to exercise their rights. Those with inadequate or overbearing regulations make it impossible to start new enterprises, often leading to concentration of power and wealth. A lack of good infrastructure inhibits successful entrepreneurship. And the poor and vulnerable will suffer the most due to these problems.

However, cities and countries that invest in just and accountable institutions and good infrastructure management can bring about lasting change. Eliminating bribery puts more people on an equal footing. Regulatory schemes that are reasonable and intelligible to the ordinary person can protect resources from misuse while guaranteeing access to those resources by anyone with a good idea and the willingness to work for it. Creating systems that are just and accountable will increase their use by those most likely to be excluded. This is essential to addressing the poverty and ensuring that cities are truly sustainable and achieve authentic development for all members of the community.

People who are empowered have the ability to make free decisions about where to live. Human mobility should be a choice, not a condition for living. Education, SDG 4, is also a key enabler and ensures that everyone has equal opportunities and the ability to size new opportunities, wherever they may be. Quality education must be available to all on an equal basis and should flow from an authentic understanding of the human person, and foster respect for self and others in solidarity. The primary responsibility of education rests on the parents and it is the obligation of the State to support them in this role.

World Youth Alliance has developed a curriculum that can support children in all aspects of their studies through a focus on self-understanding and personal development. The Human Dignity Curriculum (HDC) teaches children about human dignity: that every human being has it, and should therefore be respected. It also teaches children that, regardless of their circumstances, they have the potential to be excellent, to develop their gifts, and to use these gifts for the common good. The HDC is culturally sensitive and encourages parental involvement.

Young people who understand human dignity are not only prepared to make responsible personal decisions, but to contribute to their communities and to treat others with respect in their families, peer groups, and communities, including in their personal relationships. This is the education that truly supports sustainable development. It fosters the peaceful and thriving communities, creating the conditions where people are able to move out of desire rather than need.

International migration can raise challenges and opportunities for development, for migrants as well as their countries of origin, transit, and destination. It is important to achieve authentic development, which is a process that takes place at all levels of society, creating a social, political, and economic environment that allows persons to reach their full physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional potential in a way that reflects and respects the values of each distinct culture.

States have the responsibility to maintain peace and security in a transparent manner and have the right to regulate migration. Where States do regulate migration, they must do so in accordance with their national and international obligations, and must always protect the human dignity of all migrants, in particular refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons.

As young people, we are especially concerned about the protection of minors in migration flows. Minors are vulnerable to exploitation, trafficking, abuse, and radicalization, especially in the case of unaccompanied minors. We must prioritize the protection of minors to prevent these abuses through education to enable them to identify and report potentially dangerous situations and nurture better decision-making capacity while ensuring more stringent laws to support youth affected by abuse.

Individuals, society, governments, and institutions need to work in solidarity to foster the conditions such as freedom, peace, and security that lead to development. World Youth Alliance asks the Commission to ensure that efforts for sustainability are grounded in the human person and human dignity with a focus on empowering people through investing in human capital and education. We stand ready to work with you to achieve this.